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## **Colombia: Government In Upheaval Over Extradition Policy, Response To Drug Mafias' Bombing Campaign**

*by John Neagle*

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Dec. 7: In an editorial, El Espectador insisted that all presidential candidates for party nomination should withdraw. An El Tiempo headline read, "Drug Traffickers Turn Bogota into Beirut." Both newspapers said the situation was so serious President Virgilio Barco should ask all parties to forget their differences and form a common front against traffickers. El Espectador said the crisis extends beyond the traffickers' terrorist campaign to encompass a political system on the verge of collapse. A bomb exploded on a road in Cartagena, killing two policemen in a car, radio reports said. Pamphlets left at the site indicated the attack was the work of the guerrilla National Liberation Army (ELN). Drug traffickers have insisted that Colombians be allowed to vote on the government's extradition policy. The Extraditables took responsibility for the Dec. 6 bombing hours after the explosion, and pledged earlier in a communique to continue the bombing campaign until the extradition referendum is approved by the Congress. (See Chronicle 12/07/89 on bombing.) Dec. 8: The death toll was raised to 59, result of the bombing Wednesday in downtown Bogota. Hospital spokespersons said 800 people were seriously injured in the explosion and scores of others suffered minor injuries. President Virgilio Barco rejected all possibility of resignation, as suggested by members of the Social Conservative Party and his own Liberal Party. Interior Minister Carlos Lemos reportedly prepared a list of 24 legislators gobernantes requesting that they be dismissed. Lemos accused members of the parliament of being "accomplices of drug traffickers." President of the Liberal Party, Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala, resigned, reportedly because of the national political crisis. In a column in El Espectador, Maria Teresa Hernan said Colombia could end up with a "drug trafficker coup carried out with the support of colonels allied with the mafias." Dec. 10: In Tulua, 250 km. west of Bogota, Jose Wenceslao Espejo, owner and editor of El Tabloide, was shot to death. In Medellin, a bomb exploded in the museum of modern art, causing extensive damage, but no injuries. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombing. Enrique Santos Calderon, an editor of newspaper El Tiempo, wrote in a column published Sunday that the drug rings may try to take control by installing a junta similar to Manuel Noriega's government in Panama. Dec. 11: The death toll from the Dec. 6 bombing reached 63. According to an unidentified presidential spokesperson cited by AP, President Barco held emergency meetings with members of the Liberal Party, including Interior Minister Carlos Lemos, former presidents and congressional leaders. One of Barco's principal objectives was to repair relations with the congress and prevent the Senate from approving a national referendum on extradition. A congressional committee was scheduled to vote Dec. 12 on whether to send the bill to the Senate. The Senate could either act on the legislation before the end of its term Dec. 15, or choose to ignore the bill. The House of Representatives voted 109-4 on Dec. 5 to approve a national referendum on extradition. In an editorial, El Espectador suggested that traffickers had paid House members to vote for the referendum. Colombia's drug crisis resulted from "the magnitude of drug trafficker's corruption that has reached the congress in such a disgraceful way," it said. Former president Carlos Lleras Restrepo said in an editorial for Nueva Frontera, a weekly magazine he owns, that the country faced an offensive by criminals

"offering millions of dollars" to influence the legislative process. (Basic data from AP, 12/07/89, 12/08/89, 12/11/89; Notimex, 12/08/89; AFP, 12/11/89)

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